

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Supermac

D.R. Thorpe

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[*List of Illustrations*](#)

[*Preface*](#)

[PRELUDE](#)

[PART ONE: Voices in the Air, 1894-1940](#)

[1 Working Class Ancestry](#)

[2 Distant Prospects, 1894-1910](#)

[3 Sent Down by the Kaiser, 1910-1914](#)

[4 To Arms, 1914-1918](#)

[5 ADC and Son-in-Law, 1919-1923](#)

[6 The Cleverest of the Coming Men, 1923-1929](#)

[7 Ebbs and Flows, 1929-1935](#)

[8 Democracy Can Do Better, 1935-1940](#)

[PART TWO: An Insider at Last, 1940-1951](#)

[9 On the Other Side of the Fence, 1940-1942](#)

[10 At One Strategic Point, 1942-1943](#)

[11 So Many Hollow Factions, 1943-1945](#)

[12 Conspiracy at Klagenfurt?, May 1945](#)

[13 The Possibilities of Defeat, 1945](#)

[14 The Wooden Horse of Peace, 1945-1950](#)

[15 One More Heave, 1950-1951](#)

[PART THREE: Believing in the Future, 1951-1957](#)

[16 Setting the People Free, 1951-1954](#)

[17 Captain of the Praetorian Guard, 1954-1955](#)

[18 Nearer to the Centre, 1955](#)

[19 View from a Treasury Window, 1955-1956](#)

[20 The Economic Consequences of Colonel Nasser, 1956-1957](#)

[PART FOUR: Top of the Greasy Pole, 1957-1986](#)

[21 Rebuilding, 1957](#)

[22 Local Difficulties and Wider Visions, 1958](#)

[23 Porpoises in the North Sea, 1959](#)

[24 Return to Africa, 1960](#)

[25 Turning Points, 1960-1961](#)

[26 Seeing Beyond the Trees, 1961](#)

[27 Searching For A Role, 1961-1962](#)

[28 Opening Pandora's Box, 1962-1963](#)

[29 Guided Democracy, October 1963](#)

[30 Leaving the Green Room, 1963-1986](#)

[ENVOI](#)

[Appendix: The Memorandum for the Queen, 18 October 1963](#)

[Select Bibliography](#)

[Notes](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Abbreviations](#)

[Picture Section](#)

[Also by D.R.Thorpe](#)

[Copyright](#)

SUPERMAC

THE LIFE OF HAROLD MACMILLAN

D. R. THORPE



Chatto & Windus
LONDON

For Robert and Kathleen Stewart

To succeed pre-eminently in English public life it is necessary to conform either to the popular image of a bookie or a clergyman.

Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Infernal Grove*

List of Illustrations

- [1.](#) The croft of the Macmillan family on the Isle of Arran
- [2.](#) Harold Macmillan's American mother, Nellie, as a young woman (*The Macmillan Family Archives/The Trustees of the Harold Macmillan Book Trust*)
- [3.](#) Harold Macmillan's father, Maurice, at the age of 29 (*The Macmillan Family Archives/The Trustees of the Harold Macmillan Book Trust*)
- [4.](#) The Macmillan brothers: Daniel, Arthur and Harold (*The Macmillan Family Archives/The Trustees of the Harold Macmillan Book Trust*)
- [5.](#) Harold Macmillan at the 4th of June celebrations at Eton College, 1907 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [6.](#) Sligger Urquhart (*Reproduced by kind permission of Balliol College Archives*)
- [7.](#) The Battle of Loos, 1915 (*Imperial War Museum*)
- [8.](#) Marriage of Harold Macmillan and Lady Dorothy Cavendish, 1920 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [9.](#) Captain Macmillan, M.P. for Stockton-on-Tees, watching the Stockton and Thornaby sports with Lady Dorothy (*By courtesy of David Faber*)
- [10.](#) Caroline and Sarah Macmillan (*By courtesy of David Faber*)
- [11.](#) Ronald Knox (*National Portrait Gallery*)
- [13.](#) John Maynard Keynes (*National Portrait Gallery*)
- [12.](#) Oswald Mosley (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)

- [14.](#) Harold Macmillan as 'Viceroy of the Mediterranean' in Sicily with General Bedell Smith, General Eisenhower, Air Marshal Tedder, General Alexander and Admiral Cunningham
- [15.](#) Archbishop Damaskinos and Winston Churchill in Athens, 1944 (*Getty/Time & Life Pictures*)
- [16.](#) Captured Axis aircraft at Klagenfurt, 1945
- [17.](#) The Right Road for Britain: Macmillan in reforming mood at the 1949 Conservative Conference (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [18.](#) The South Bank site of the Festival of Britain, 1951 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [19.](#) Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan in Geneva, 1955 (*Getty/Time & Life Pictures*)
- [20.](#) Harold Macmillan after his appointment as Prime Minister, 10 January 1957 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [21.](#) The two Ernies: Ernest Marples and ERNIE, the Electronic Random Number Indicating Equipment, as the Premium Bonds draw begins, June 1957 (*Press Association*)
- [22.](#) Bob Boothby when Rector of St Andrews University (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [23.](#) Four Tory Chancellors: Peter Thorneycroft (*Topham*); Derick Heathcoat Amory (*Topham*); Selwyn Lloyd (*Sunday Pictorial*); Reginald Maudling (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [24.](#) The visit of President Eisenhower in August 1959 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [25.](#) Lord Home as Foreign Secretary, 1960
- [26.](#) Major Hoare announces the result of the 1959 election in Billericay, 10 p.m. on 8 October (*Conservative Party Archive/Bodleian Library, Oxford*)

- [27.](#) Macmillan, victorious in his Bromley constituency, 9 October 1959 (*Press Association*)
- [28.](#) Macmillan reviews the First King's African Rifles, Lusaka, 22 January 1960 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [29.](#) Khrushchev, 'the Cold War Warrior'
- [30.](#) Macmillan with the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, July 1961 (*Press Association*)
- [31.](#) De Gaulle and Adenauer, May 1962 (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [32.](#) Macmillan & Co. Publishers – Muriel Spark leaving the building in St Martin's Street (*Mark Gerson*)
- [33.](#) Mandy Rice-Davies and Christine Keeler, July 1963 (*Press Association*)
- [34.](#) Harold Macmillan with President Kennedy at Birch Grove, June 1963 (*Press Association*)
- [35.](#) The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh with Jacqueline Kennedy and her children at Runnymede, May 1965 (*Press Association*)
- [36.](#) Macmillan and Tito (*Getty/Hulton Archive*)
- [37.](#) Harold Macmillan with his son Maurice (*Camera Press*)
- [38.](#) Harold Macmillan as Oxford Chancellor with his grandson David Faber (*By courtesy of David Faber*)

CARTOONS

- 'Supermac' by Vicky (*Evening Standard*) 6 November 1958 (*Solo Syndication*)
- Balliol in 1911 by Edmond H. New (*Balliol Archives*)
- 'Rechristening of Blimp' by Low, 11 September 1946 (*David Low/Solo Syndication*)
- Cartoon of 24 January 1952 by George Butterworth (*Butterworth Political Cartoon Society*)

'Is that the one we swapped for Burgess?' Cartoon by
Osbert Lancaster (*Reproduced by kind permission of
Clare Hastings*)

'I told you this sort of stuff will fetch em back into the old
cinema' by Vicky (*Evening Standard*) 17 November
1958 (*Solo Syndication*)

Harold Macmillan in the USSR by Vicky (*New Statesman*)
March 1959 (*Vicky/Solo Syndication*)

'Eastward Ho!' by Cummings (after Millais),
(*Cummings/Daily Express*)

Preface

The first time I met Harold Macmillan was on St George's Day, 1975, at Birch Grove, the family home near Chelwood Gate, where the daffodils shone in the spring sunshine. He had agreed to talk to me about Sir Austen Chamberlain, Lord Curzon and Rab Butler, of whom I was then writing a biographical triptych. He opened the door of Birch Grove, the only person in that vast, rambling house, and shuffled forward to greet me, for all the world like Anton Chekhov's aged manservant Firs in a Sussex production of *The Cherry Orchard*.¹ We went through to the library, where a log fire was burning in the grate. 'Now tell me exactly what it is you are writing,' he asked, 'so I can help the more.' I explained that I was writing about three prominent Conservative politicians who had reached the penultimate rung on the party ladder, but who had, nevertheless, despite expectations, remained 'the uncrowned prime ministers'. 'Oh, I see,' replied Macmillan, 'kind of failed BAs.' Already there was a wry smile on his face, and I sensed that he was going to enjoy this meeting as much as I would. 'Well, of course,' he continued, putting another log on the fire, 'if you want to make it a more amusing book, you could always add a fourth section, on George Brown ...'

Harold Macmillan transcended party. 'He was a rebel in the Tory Party in the 1930s, and, in a sense, he is a rebel still,' wrote Hugh Trevor-Roper, when Macmillan was Prime Minister.² Later in 1975, when Rab Butler heard that I had

spoken to Macmillan, he enquired of me, 'How was Harold Macmillan when you met him? Was he the Duke's son-in-law or the crofter's great grandson?' Of course, Macmillan played both parts, and many others beside.

On the table at Birch Grove lay a copy of his firm's recent publication, a biography of Oswald Mosley by Robert Skidelsky, and initially Macmillan spoke of Mosley (a member by marriage of his wife's family) and of how Mosley's big mistake was not in crossing the floor from the Conservatives to Labour, or in attempting 'to break the mould' of British politics by forming the New Party in 1931, but in embracing extremism in the form of the British Union of Fascists, which the British public in their wisdom would never accept.

This was the prelude to an afternoon of fascinating reminiscences, including a visit to the park where President Kennedy's helicopter had landed in June 1963, and from where it had taken off, 'sailing down the valley above the heavily laden, lush foliage of oaks and beech'.³ This was the last time Macmillan saw Kennedy, 'the loved one'. Even 12 years later, as he traced the course of the flight, tears came to his eyes.

We went into the muniment room and he showed me his dark-covered notebook diaries, volumes that I would later study in detail. He made me a cup of tea, and took me to the door, wished me luck, and waved as my car drew away up the drive.

Ten years later, Macmillan saw me again, this time in the boardroom of Macmillan & Co. in Little Essex Street, to talk about Selwyn Lloyd. The visual image endures, the aged figure replicating the Bryan Organ portrait on the wall behind him, half blind, but still mentally alert and vividly reliving the past, drawing unusual and illuminating historical parallels from his long political life, comparing

Selwyn Lloyd with Augustine Birrell, also a Cambridge-educated lawyer-politician with Liverpool connections, who 'always retained a deep respect for the Liberal nonconformist tradition of his Liverpool upbringing'.⁴ The next year Macmillan was dead, and shortly afterwards the Birch Grove estate was sold.

The last time I went to Birch Grove, in April 1993, it was an empty shell. Indeed, this visit was a poignant experience. I was researching Alec Douglas-Home's life, and had just finished one of my regular week's work into the private papers at the Hirsell, the Home family home in Coldstream. By a combination of chance and necessity, 36 hours later I was at Birch Grove, completing research in the Macmillan papers, then at Porches Farm House on the estate, in the custody of Mrs Sylvia James. I went with Sylvia James for a last, nostalgic look at the big house.

The Hirsell was a settled world of continuity and homeliness, Labradors sleeping on the hearth, gum boots and fishing rods in the hall, and the laughter of grandchildren in the corridors. Birch Grove, by contrast, was now empty, a mixture of druggets and sheets, with long-silent dusty bell boards ('Mr Harold's Room', 'Mr Dan's Room', 'Mr Arthur's Room'). In the library, which I remembered lined with books, was a cold grate and a solitary full-sized billiard table, awaiting the final visit of the removal men. We went down corridors, into empty room after empty room, for all the world like Guy Perron and Sarah Layton in Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*, wandering through the Raj's deserted and empty summer residence of whose vanished splendours we were 'no more than observers',⁵ to the saloon where Kennedy and his entourage had discussed the future of the world in June 1963, out on to the terrace where the two world leaders had been photographed, and so on up the stairs down which Lady Dorothy Macmillan's body had been carried on

a door. From the old attic bedroom, overlooking a side garden, where Macmillan had died in 1986, the distant sound of bulldozers could already be heard as the new owners began laying out an 18-hole golf course⁶ over some of the best shooting land in Sussex. The Lopahins had arrived.⁷

D.R. Thorpe,
Oxford, May 2010

PRELUDE

On the night of the general election of Thursday 8 October 1959, Major Geoffrey Hoare, the High Sheriff of Essex, stepped outside the counting hall in Billericay and announced the result at one minute before 10 p.m. Billericay was the first seat to be declared, as it had been at the general election in May 1955, when the Conservatives had won by 4,206 votes. Now Major Hoare read out the 1959 figures in front of television and newsreel cameras and a large crowd, most in hats and wrapped in coats against the evening chill. Edward Gardner, the Conservative candidate, had been elected with an increased majority of 4,822 votes.¹ There were still 629 seats to be declared.

The Leader of the Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell, was in his Leeds constituency, preparing for the count in the town hall, and when his assistant, John Harris, told him the figures from Billericay, he said to his aides, 'We've lost by a hundred seats.'² When the final result was declared from Orkney and Shetland (the constituency of the Liberal leader, Jo Grimond) at Saturday lunchtime on 10 October, Gaitskell's prediction was fulfilled.³ In his tenth, and what was to prove his last, election Harold Macmillan had led the Conservatives to victory with a majority of exactly one hundred.

The 1959 general election was the greatest moment of Macmillan's political career, the equivalent, for him, of Lloyd George's triumph when, on 29 June 1919, King George V, abandoning protocol, had personally greeted him

at Victoria station on his return from the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty and driven with him to Buckingham Palace.⁴ In 1959, Queen Elizabeth II, without compromising the monarchy's impartiality, sent Macmillan a warm letter on his re-election.

Labour responses reflected the nature of the Conservative victory. Tony Benn gloomily recorded in his diary, 'The Tory majority is 100, and the [Labour] Party will really have to reorganise itself.'⁵ Patrick Gordon Walker ruefully admitted, 'The simple fact is that the Tories identified themselves with the new working class rather better than we did.'⁶ It was unequivocally Macmillan's personal triumph, in strategy, timing and conduct. He had travelled the length and breadth of Britain and spoken at 74 meetings. Herbert Morrison thought the Tory revival since Suez 'was largely due to the skilful politics of Harold Macmillan, together with his intuitive understanding of a large proportion of the British people'.⁷

The visit of President Eisenhower to Britain earlier in the year, stage-managed to perfection by Macmillan, had enhanced Macmillan's position on the world stage. However, he knew that foreign policy rarely, if ever, decides the outcome of general elections. Next Friday's grocery bill is always more important. In his famous 'never had it so good' speech in Bedford on 20 July 1959, Macmillan had said: 'Taking the nation as a whole compared with six years ago, personal incomes are 40% up, and though prices have risen they have only risen by 20%.'⁸ Uniquely in modern times, full employment, stable prices and a strong balance of payments coincided at the time of the 1959 general election. Such economic facts were a powerful electoral weapon, as Gaitskell himself conceded. 'The main reason for our 1955 and 1959 defeats is surely that the people were better off, and that the Tory propaganda was very

effective.’⁹ The Conservative election slogan – ‘Life’s better with the Conservatives. Don’t let Labour ruin it’ – seemed not so much a party political point as a self-evident truth.

In the hot summer of 1959, Macmillan was relaxing one afternoon in the garden of his Sussex residence, Birch Grove, with one of his grandsons, who regretted the seemingly ever-present drone of aircraft from nearby Gatwick Airport. Macmillan told him it was a good thing. People were going abroad on holidays they could once never have dreamed of; they would come home refreshed and happy, and in the autumn would re-elect the Conservatives. And so they did.

Indeed, the Conservative Party had improved its position over four successive elections – 1950, 1951, 1955, 1959 – a point emphasised by Anthony Eden in his letter of congratulation to Macmillan. ‘It is also astonishing that the progression in the Tory majority has been so steady: 17, 60, 100,’ Eden wrote. ‘A form of payment by results which is something new in modern politics and very sensible.’¹⁰ The post-mortems soon considered whether Labour could ever win again. ‘Is Britain settling down into a one-party nation?’ asked one of Macmillan’s earliest, and best, biographers in *Anatomy of Britain*.¹¹ Macmillan drew two lessons from the triumph. He believed it showed that the class war was dead, and that the Conservative Party must remain on modern and progressive lines. But he also knew that political fortune was transitory. The 1959 election was the pinnacle, but from such a position there was only one route.

Macmillan’s triumph was a long time coming. Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain had waited 15 and 19 years respectively from entering Parliament for the Premiership; for Macmillan the wait was 31 years. Indeed, few leading politicians have first taken any office so

relatively late in their careers: he had been in the House for 16 years before he had a sniff of the humblest office.

‘That was unusual,’ he told James Lees-Milne. ¹²

Macmillan was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; like Elizabeth-Jane Henchard, in the Hardy novel Macmillan admired most, he knew that ‘happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain’. ¹³ He contemplated, and may even have attempted, suicide. In industrial Stockton-on-Tees, his pre-war constituency, his innate melancholy was acknowledged. ¹⁴

A rebel in the 1920s and 1930s, he was never an MP of the type on whom the whips’ office looked with favour. To have been correct before the war on both the key issues, unemployment and the appeasement of Nazi Germany, and to have been articulate in his criticisms, was not the quickest way to the inner governing circles of his party. Macmillan knew that there were illogical, even contradictory, responses to appeasement. Geoffrey Dawson, the imperialist editor of *The Times*, differed in his response, depending on who the dictator was. Macmillan had no time for such compromise. ¹⁵ As a result he was one of the ‘troublesome young men’; ¹⁶ he knew that the whips liked ‘safe men’ and, like Churchill, he had a career that contained elements of the steeplechase.

But what a steeplechase it was. Macmillan was at the centre of key events of the twentieth century. During the Second World War, he was the trusted adviser of Eisenhower and Alexander. After the War, he helped modernise the Conservative Party to make it relevant to new world conditions. Then in 1951 he set out on 12 years at the heart of government, beginning with his triumphant spell at the Ministry of Housing and culminating with six

years as the Prime Minister who presided over Britain's transition from austerity to affluence.

Of course, his star was to fade, and he always attracted criticism from those opponents who saw him as a poseur. Aneurin Bevan, Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary, gave free rein to his feelings. 'I have watched him carefully for years,' he declared in Manchester in March 1959. 'Behind that Edwardian countenance there is nothing.' At the Durham Miners' Gala later that year, Bevan said that Macmillan was fraudulent, 'posing like an incandescent aspidistra'. ¹⁷

That Macmillan was a skilled actor, few would doubt, but the mask was not a pose. It was more important for what it hid, than what it revealed. What Bevan failed to acknowledge was Macmillan's chameleon-like quality, his ability to blend with, and then appeal to, a remarkably broad cross-section of mid-century British society.

*

Although Macmillan had characteristics of many successful predecessors, notably Benjamin Disraeli (for adventure) and Stanley Baldwin (for reassurance), the figure on whom he consciously modelled himself was A. J. Balfour, the only other truly intellectual prime minister of the twentieth century, with his hooded eyes, the seemingly languid appearance and apparent unflappability. Even Balfour's aphorisms could be mistaken for Macmillan's. 'When I'm at work on politics,' Balfour once told John Morley, 'I long to be in literature, and *vice versa*.'¹⁸ Balfour's mixture of Scottish merchant antecedents and aristocratic background reflected Macmillan's persona, and confused those who mistakenly thought Balfour 'the whiff of scent on a pocket handker-chief'.¹⁹ Macmillan knew better. 'Beneath that

gentle and courteous exterior,' he wrote of Balfour, 'one sensed an iron strength of will.'²⁰ So it was with Macmillan, who, like Balfour, was more or less happy when being praised and not very uncomfortable when being abused, but who had 'moments of uneasiness when ... being explained'.²¹

Biography, though, is a process of explanation. Macmillan's journey through life until that climactic moment on 8 October 1959 took many turns, at times contradictory, at others seemingly inexplicable - like a great lake, full of bustling activity on the surface, with white horses, gulls swooping, flotsam dipping and turning, yet underneath a permanent powerful undertow. Like Disraeli, he was passionate about improving 'the condition of the people'²² and 'extending the co-operative effort of all those who believed in freedom'.²³ His story begins at a remote spot, the ruined Cock Farm at Lochranza, on the northern tip of the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde.

PART ONE

Voices in the Air

1894-1940

Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or for evil.

J. M. Keynes



Balliol in Macmillan's time.

CHAPTER ONE

Working Class Ancestry

Terrible business, Roy, this insult to the Prime Minister by our old University, terrible. You know it's really a matter of class. The dons are mainly upper middle class, and they can never forgive Mrs Thatcher for being so lower middle class. But you and I, Roy, with our working class ancestry, are above that kind of thing.

Harold Macmillan to Roy Jenkins on the occasion of Oxford University's vote against granting Mrs Thatcher an honorary degree, 1985.¹

How was Harold Macmillan when you met him? Was he the Duke's son-in-law or the crofter's great-grandson?

Rab Butler to the author, 20 November 1975

Three vistas from the rocky summit of Goat Fell, the Isle of Arran's highest point, define the history of the Macmillan clan. Argyll, Sannox and Irvine can all be seen on a clear day. These were views well known to Harold Macmillan's ancestors, who had lived in a croft at the Cock of Arran, beneath Goat Fell's northern slopes, near the village of Lochranza. Then, as now, the easy walk to the peak was a popular excursion.²

To the north-west of Goat Fell, on a line to the distant Paps of Jura, lies Argyll, where the known patriarch of the

family, Daniel, had farmed in the eighteenth century at Dunmore, on a barren tongue of land he owned in North Knapdale. Its gaunt beauty later attracted painters of renown. ³ The Macmillans (the name was then McMillan, the Irish spelling) had earlier been vassals of the Lords of the Isles there and could trace their line back to the twelfth century Cormac, Bishop of Dunkeld, whose great-great-great grandfather had been the Scottish King Macbeth. Daniel's religious zeal was matched only by his ambitious diligence, characteristics inherited by his son Malcolm, who settled his growing family (he eventually had 10 children) in 1769 on the nearby Isle of Arran, where he hoped there would be better agricultural prospects.

At first Malcolm farmed at Sannox, ⁴ but he soon became the tacksman (or chief leaseholder) of farms at the Cock, the northernmost point of Arran, and it was the photograph of his croft there that Harold Macmillan later kept on his desk at 10 Downing Street.⁵ A tacksman was an important figure in the isolated rural communities, as Dr Johnson discovered on his journey to the Western Islands. 'Next in dignity to the Laird is the Tacksman,' he observed, 'a large taker or leaseholder of land, of which he keeps part, as a domain, in his own hand, and lets part to under tenants.'⁶

Like his father, Malcolm was deeply religious, an elder of the Established Church, whose discouragement of the superstitious belief in witchcraft in the local community ('be these juggling fiends no more believed')⁷ echoed that of the Shakespearean portrait of Macbeth, his far-distant ancestor. Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, described Malcolm as 'a sort of "chief peasant"',⁸ and he was remembered as a benevolent figure, generous to those poorer than himself, though conditions for him, too, were arduous. Sheep farming and peat

brought in little money under a 'run-rig' system whereby tenants drew annual lots to allocate strips of arable land, with animals being tended communally. Sir Walter Scott evoked the penurious atmosphere of the region in his poem, *The Lord of the Isles*:

On fair Lochranza stream'd the early day,
Thin wreaths of cottage-smoke are upward curl'd
From the lone hamlet, which her inland bay
And circling mountains sever from the world.
And there the fisherman his sail unfurl'd,
The goat-herd drove his kids to steep Ben-Ghoil,
Before the hut the dame her spindle twirl'd,
Courting the sunbeam as she plied her toil, -
For, wake where'er he may, Man wakes to care and
toil. [9](#)

Care and toil was certainly the lot of Malcolm's third son, Duncan (1770-1823), born in North Sannox but brought up at the Cock. Two older sons moved to the mainland, leaving Duncan to eke out what living he could. In 1793 he married Katherine Crawford (1772-1835), daughter of William Crawford, who hailed from Ayrshire, and was another elder of the Church.^{[10](#)} From his father-in-law, Duncan inherited a farm at Achog, at the north end of the village of Corrie, below Sannox Bay, and it was here that his own Daniel, grandfather of the Prime Minister and founder of the publishing company, was born on 13 September 1813, the eleventh of twelve children, four of whom had died young of tuberculosis. Daniel's younger brother, Alexander, his parents' last child, was born on 3 October 1818, though by that time the family was established on the mainland at Irvine, visible due east from Goat Fell.

The move reflected both the harsh conditions following the reorganisation of the North Arran farms in 1815 and Duncan's determination to better his family's fortunes. John Burrell, agent to the trustees of the tenth Duke of Hamilton (one of whose family seats was Brodick Castle, to the south of Corrie), had surveyed the Duke's farms in North Arran and recommended 'rationalisation', which left Duncan as one of the losers. The 'run-rig' system was ended and high grazing land given over to sheep, as a result of which Duncan was forced in 1816 to seek work elsewhere to support his family.

So ended the family's direct association with Arran, often called 'Scotland in miniature'. For Duncan Macmillan, the mining town of Irvine offered not only more promising possibilities, but essential ones, as he was facing destitution. He became a carter, transporting coal destined for Ireland to Irvine's harbour. His son Daniel, three at the time of the move, was enrolled in due course at the local common school, later Irvine Academy, an archetypal acorn moment. Duncan's two older brothers, Malcolm and William, had already anticipated the family move and were working as carpenters on building this new school, before seeking even better prospects at sea. The whole process was thus an earlier example of what Norman Tebbit told Conservative delegates his father had done in the harsh conditions of the 1930s - 'he got on his bike and looked for work'. [11](#)

Daniel never forgot the poverty of his early childhood. But the family, in its small way, was now established on the mainland and, as an outward sign of this new beginning, changed the spelling of its name from McMillan to Macmillan. Dr Johnson had found the atmosphere of the Western Islands oppressive. 'He felt today the weight of this barren way of passing time,' recorded James Boswell on 7 October 1773. 'He said, "I want to be on the mainland,

and go on with existence. This is a waste of life.”¹² What it must have been like for those permanently cabined and cribbed on an island in the late eighteenth century can only be imagined. Advancement, as so often for Scotsmen, meant emigration, even if only in this case across the Firth of Clyde, where the Macmillans were now ‘getting on with existence’.

Daniel and Alexander were nine and four respectively when in 1823 their father Duncan died, worn down by physical work and responsibility. Their seafaring uncles, Malcolm, who died in 1840, and William, who died in 1838, gave what help they could, but the greatest influence was their mother Katherine, who, befitting the Crawford Ayrshire Covenanting stock from which she sprang, gave them a devout religious upbringing. Daniel left school at the age of 10, and on 1 January 1824 was apprenticed to Maxwell Dicks, an Irvine bookseller, at a wage of 1s. 6d a week. The drudge and poverty of toiling on the land were now a thing of the past.

Daniel’s apprenticeship was successfully completed on 14 February 1831, after which he went to Stirling, where he fell ill with ‘a brain fever’. Following superficial recovery, he moved to the bigger stage of Glasgow to work in Mr Thomas Atkinson’s bookshop, an altogether grander enterprise.¹³ He was Atkinson’s shopman, but was ambitious and hoped for a partnership. Atkinson’s shop was a centre of intellectual activity, and Daniel embarked on what amounted to a delayed education, reading widely and joining in discussions about the concerns of the day. The English Reform Bill was a central issue, and when the bill passed the House of Commons, there was a general illumination of the city. This was a formative time for the young Daniel.

In 1831 Glasgow was the third largest city in the United Kingdom after London and Manchester.¹⁴ But it was also disease-ridden, and Daniel's career stalled through bad health. He returned to Irvine, where his mother nursed him. It was her death two years later that determined him to leave Scotland altogether.

His first visit to London proved an abortive experience. He failed to secure a post with Longman's, the publishers, and took various small jobs, before finding employment in Cambridge with a bookshop run by Elijah Johnson. The three years he spent here nurtured not only his commercial experience but his intellectual insights. In 1837, he secured a permanent post at Seeley's & Co, publishers and booksellers in Fleet Street. His salary was £60 a year.

Illness again drew him back to his family roots. Alexander, his younger brother, had not prospered and Daniel conceived the idea of getting him a post at Seeley's. When this materialised, also at a salary of £60 per annum, the two brothers established themselves in a boarding house in Charterhouse Square. Here it was plain living, by economic necessity, and high thinking, by choice.¹⁵ Alexander, self-taught, put together a short collection of Shelley's poems, together with a biographical sketch, which was published by George Bell. The Macmillans now were not only selling books but writing them. Shortly they would be publishing them as well.

The key year was 1843. Anxious for independence, the Macmillan brothers set up their own bookselling business in Aldersgate Street, but this proved too distant from the traditional London book-buying public. When an opportunity came to buy the business of Richard Newby in Cambridge, they seized it at once. By then Daniel had published his first book, *The Philosophy of Training* by A. R. Craig.